

## **Introduction: Phonetic fieldwork in Southern New Guinea**

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This special publication of Language Documentation & Conservation represents a collection of the first available phonetic descriptions of several languages of Southern New Guinea. This area encompasses the southernmost regions of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. The languages included in this collection belong to multiple non-related, non-Austronesian, and non-Australian families and include Yelmek (Yelmek-Makle family; by **TINA GREGOR**), Ngkolmpu (Yam family; by **MATTHEW CARROLL**), Nmbo (Yam family; by **ERI KASHIMA**), Idi (Pahoturi River family; by **DINEKE SCHOKKIN** and colleagues), Bitur (Trans-New Guinea family; by **PHILLIP ROGERS**), and Urama (Kiwai family; by **JASON BROWN** and colleagues). Our issue opens with an overview of the region's phonetic systems by **NICHOLAS EVANS** (p. 7), and then each language is detailed in turn. First, we will contextualize the format of this special issue and the methodologies used for collecting, analyzing, and archiving the data in Southern New Guinea.

### **Format**

The linguistic landscape of the Southern New Guinea region is diverse, dense, and widely unexplored (Evans 2012). To facilitate comparative research in this area, we have formatted the phonetic descriptions in this volume to be similar to one another and to the two other published phonetic descriptions of Southern New Guinea languages: that on Nen (Yam; by Evans & Miller [2016]) and Ende (Pahoturi River; by Lindsey [2021]). Each of the articles in this issue describes the language's phonemic inventory and provides minimal pairs for both consonantal and vocalic contrasts. In addition, the phonetic qualities of each phoneme are described, and, where known, allophonic patterns are illuminated. Finally, each description concludes with a phonemically transcribed text with basic morphological glossing.

The symbolic representation used to represent the phonetic variation and phonemic categories for each language adheres closely to the guidelines developed by the International Phonetic Association for the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (International Phonetic Association 1999). Likewise, the abbreviations used to provide morphological glossing for all language examples are those that have been conventionalized by the Leipzig Glossing Rules (Comrie, Haspelmath & Bickel 2015). Any unconventional glosses are defined in a footnote on first use.

We submitted this issue to the Language Documentation & Conservation journal intentionally because of their open-access policies and willingness to publish sound-based research articles with both embedded audio and supplemental materials. These practices increase the accessibility and quality of our data presentation, which is especially important when handling primary documentation and description materials from isolated language communities. Thus, throughout the following articles, care has been taken to exemplify each analysis with a language datum that has a suitable audio

recording. These recordings have been converted to MP3 files for embedding within the PDF and preserved as WAV files within each article's supplementary materials.

## Methods

The analyses presented in this issue are based on data collected by linguistic researchers in collaboration with language experts. The recordings were made over a period of several months in a locale where the language is spoken on a daily basis. This data collection methodology, also called linguistic fieldwork, informed the analyses presented here by allowing the researchers to hear the language as spoken by many members of the community over a substantial period, even though the accompanying audio files may represent only one token as spoken by one speaker on one day. The lead researchers in this collection are not local members of the communities in which the languages under discussion are spoken. Thus, each analysis is somewhat biased by the unique positionalities, linguistic competencies, and theoretical backgrounds of each researcher. Long-term linguistic fieldwork allows for the types of prolonged conversations with linguistic experts that can better inform the analyses and mitigate researcher bias.

Besides these commonalities, there are some critical methodological distinctions among these works. Most notably, the data collections by **ERI KASHIMA** and by **DINEKE SCHOKKIN** and colleagues form part of a broader research effort aiming to explore sociolinguistic variation in small speech communities, the ARC Laureate project *The Wellsprings of Linguistic Diversity* (2014-2019). As such, these two researchers focussed on recording parallel data (including interviews and word lists) from a wide-ranging sample of speakers to capture interspeaker variation within communities. Data collections by other contributors to the volume are more representative of the classic type of language documentation projects, aiming at documentary and descriptive breadth, though not necessarily representing various social groups. In both cases, external researchers spent significant amounts of time familiarizing themselves with the languages as they are naturalistically spoken within the respective communities.

With this special publication, we highlight the importance of community collaboration and the use of fieldwork-based data when studying the phonetics of underdescribed languages. Having access to background knowledge about the language and its speakers enriches these studies in multiple ways. We also honour the speech communities, without whose collaboration this research would not have been possible, by maximising their visibility in each chapter and by explicitly acknowledging individuals who contributed whenever their wish is for us to do so.

This type of linguistic fieldwork methodology, however, comes with particular challenges. For instance, while all authors have taken the utmost care to select audio of suitable quality, available audio recordings reflect noisy field conditions. Recording audio in a strictly controlled environment is not an option for most if not all languages of the Southern New Guinea region. Second, these works reflect the first phonetic and phonological analyses of the languages in question, and for some, the first in the language family. Thus, they are presented without the enrichment from comparison with prior analyses of the language or related languages.

Nevertheless, we believe that the benefits these manuscripts bring to the language documentation enterprise and our understanding of the world's linguistic diversity outweigh these weaknesses. We hope that this special publication will inspire and encourage more linguistic fieldworkers to publish similar phonetic descriptions of under-researched languages.

### **More information on Southern New Guinea languages**

If you would like to learn more about the languages of Southern New Guinea, there are a couple of resources available. First, four authors of this special issue have made all or many of the primary materials collected during fieldwork available through the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC) or the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR). These collections include **TINA GREGOR**'s collection of Yelmek materials (Gregor 2015), **MATTHEW CARROLL**'s collection of Ngkolmpu data (Carroll 2012), **ERI KASHIMA**'s collection of Nmbo (Kashima 2014), **DINEKE SCHOKKIN**'s collection of Idi language (Schokkin 2014) and **PHILLIP ROGERS**' collection of Bitur recordings (Rogers 2018). Another essential resource is Evans and colleagues' (2018) chapter on the languages of Southern New Guinea in the comprehensive guide of *The Languages and Linguistics of Papua New Guinea* (Palmer 2018).

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